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## Links of the court of Henry II Plantagenet with scientific trends of the second half of the 12th century

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IDALIA SMOCZYK-JACKOWIAK

AP SŁUPSK

**LINKS OF THE COURT OF HENRY II PLANTAGENET  
WITH SCIENTIFIC TRENDS OF THE SECOND HALF  
OF THE 12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

The Renaissance of the 12<sup>th</sup> century brought about new trends in the prevalent modes of thought of the time. Certain tendencies of renewal which appeared in the science and culture of the West in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries changed the face of Europe to such an extent that this period in the history of European thought started to be referred to as the Renaissance of the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. What is more, major cathedral schools of the West acquired an academic character and their curriculum went far beyond the teaching of theology. One should mention here not only French schools in Paris, Chartres and Reims, but also English ones in Canterbury, Chester and Lincoln. Twelfth-century scholars, both clerics and clerks<sup>2</sup>, focused their interests on disciplines beyond the scope of theology: on astronomy, geometry, or optics (physics), which was possible to a great extent through the agency of the scholarly achievements of Antiquity. They rediscovered the writings of Aristotle, Plato,

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<sup>1</sup> This term was propagated by the American medievalist Charles Homer Haskins (1870-1937) in his work *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* edited in 1927 (I am using the edition of 1958).

<sup>2</sup> The English noun “clerk”, which nowadays means an office worker or an official, in the period analyzed here referred to an educated person or a scholar, which was synonymous with ‘man in a religious order, cleric, clergyman’. Due to the fact that the scholarship of the Middle Ages was limited to the clergy, they performed all the writing and notarial work of the time being the only scribes and record-keepers in the Middle Ages. In effect, the term “clerk” came to be equivalent to “scholar”. Medieval etymology of this term is more varied, as it reached English via ecclesiastical Latin *clericus* “of the clergy” from Greek *klērikos*, which in turn stemmed from *klēros* “heritage.” In that sense of the word all educated ecclesiastics, from those of lowest ranks up to archbishops, could be referred to as “clerks.” “Clerics” (clericos), on the other hand, were a group of Church officials who took holy orders: from lesser vows up to bishop’s ordination vows. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the distinction between the two terms: “Clerk” and “cleric” was often blurred. It should be emphasized that for contemporary researchers such as Jacques Le Goff the term “clerk” is equivalent to medieval intelligentsia. See his *Les Intellectuelles au Moyen Ages*, Paris 1964.

Ptolemy, Euclid as well as Latin and then Greek philologists of the ancient world. They also took advantage of Arab-Muslim scholarship, developing translations from the Arab language, most frequently via Hebrew, but sporadically also through Old Castilian<sup>3</sup>. In discreet opposition to the cosmological and cosmogonical notions of the Christian doctrine, they developed and enriched the spatial vision of the world. They aimed at reconciling theology with philosophy on rationalistic basis, going beyond the limitations of scholasticism. Those new cultural and scientific trends associated with the Twelfth Century Renaissance had a major impact on the royal court of early Plantagenets, especially of Henry II. His court attracted renowned scholars, historians and poets of the time fascinated with the writings of great authors of antiquity.

The special understanding which Henry II (1133-1189) had for literature and science stemmed from his family tradition, especially from the education and upbringing which he received in his childhood and early youth. One of his progenitors, Fulk II (c. 905-960), count of Anjou, was famous for his knowledge of Latin and of psalmody, while his father, Geoffrey Plantagenet (1113-1151), drew his military knowledge from reading *De Re Militari* of Vegetius Renatus<sup>4</sup>. Henry II's grandfather on the distaff side, the Norman ruler of England, Henry I Beauclerc (1068-1135) received a comprehensive education and enjoyed participating in scholarly disputes. When he was yet a child, he was to declare in the presence of the whole court and of his father, who was illiterate, that the king who is not able to use a quill and books is "a crowned ass"<sup>5</sup>.

His grandson, Henry Plantagenet knew Latin and spoke foreign languages. Walter Map, with a certain dose of exaggeration, credits Henry II with "having a knowledge of all the languages which are spoken from the Bay of Biscay to the Jordan"<sup>6</sup>. In his childhood and early youth Henry II was to be instructed by renowned preceptors: his first tutor was Master Peter of Saintes who was said to know the art of rhyming better than any other of his contemporaries<sup>7</sup>. Nothing is known for certain about this figure; it is not clear if it was he who taught the future king the rudiments of Latin as well as the ability to read and write. When Henry II was nine years old, his father, Geoffrey Plantagenet, who saw his son as the future king of England, placed him under the care of Robert of Gloucester (died 1147) in Bristol. While Henry was staying at Bristol, he was tutored by his mother's chancellor, referred to as a certain Master Matthew, who is said to have instructed him "in letters and man-

<sup>3</sup> F. Cardini, *Europa a Islam. Historia nieporozumienia*, Polish transl. B. Bielańska, Kraków 2006, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> W.L. Warren, *Henry II*, New Haven-London 2000, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England: From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen*, ed. J. Sharpe, J.A. Giles, London 1847, p. 425.

<sup>6</sup> W. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and translated by M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford 2002, Dist. V, c. 6, p. 476: "litteratus ad omnem decenciam et utilitatem, linguarum omnium que sunt a mari Gallico usque ad Iordanem habens scienciam, Latina tantum utens et Gallicia".

<sup>7</sup> W.L. Warren, *Henry II...*, p. 38.

ners”<sup>8</sup>. Both masters, Peter of Saintes and Matthew, can be considered as actual teachers of the future king of England. It should be emphasized, however, that even before Henry succeeded to the throne, he enjoyed the company of other scholars of the time, including distinguished men of letters. Their number was considerably increased after his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine (1124-1204) in 1152. Henry is also believed to have been instructed by an eminent Norman scholar William of Conches (died c. 1150). This assumption cannot be proved, however, and it seems that this prominent academic, a member of the School of Chartres, was loosely associated with the court of prince Henry. William of Conches probably dedicated to Henry the treatise on moral philosophy, the *De Honesto et Utili*<sup>9</sup>. This work does not rank among his representative writings, being merely a useful compilation of various philosophical and moralistic texts of such authors as Cicero, Seneca and Roman satirists. That blend of philosophy and literature, characteristic for the School of Chartres and its pupils, was referred to as “this reverent dependence on the ancients”<sup>10</sup>. It seems highly probable that William made this compilation with the purpose of arousing the interest of the monarch and his courtiers in the notions of ancient thought at the same time amusing them with satirical motifs. It might be therefore assumed that Henry II’s court was a milieu which fostered exchange of thoughts and ideas.

William of Conches fits perfectly into the array of illustrious representatives of the Twelfth Century Renaissance. The main body of his works is devoted to philosophy of nature and to physics. He drew on the works of ancient Greek writers and on Latin translations of Arab scientific treatises, which might have inspired him to refer to fascinating thinkers of medieval hermetic tradition<sup>11</sup>.

It is believed, though this assumption lacks sufficient evidence, that when Henry was yet the count of Anjou and duke of Normandy, he was tutored by the famous Adelard of Bath (died c. 1150), the English ecclesiastic, eminent scholar and traveler who knew Arabic language<sup>12</sup>. He translated into Latin several works of Arab mathematicians of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, including those of Al-Chuwarizmi and Abu al-Mashara. It was Adelard of Bath who acquainted the Western world with the astrolabe, an elaborate astronomical device inherited from the Greeks and Arabs, used to

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 208; R. Lejeune, *Rôle littéraire d’Aliénor d’Aquitaine*, “Cultura neolatina” 1954, 14, pp. 5-57, and *Rôle littéraire de la famille d’Aliénor d’Aquitaine*, “Cah. civ. med.” 1958, 1, p. 319-37; L. Génicot, *Powstaje nowy świat*, Polish transl. J.S. Łoś, Warszawa 1964, p. 176.

<sup>10</sup> Ch.H. Haskins, *Henry II as a Patron of Literature*, [in:] *Essays in Medieval History, Presented to Thomas Frederick Tout*, ed. by A.G. Little and F.M. Powicke, Manchester 1925, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Z. Kukiewicz, *Zarys filozofii średniowiecznej*, Warszawa 1973, s. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Little was known about the life and works of this eminent medieval scholar still by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See: art. *Adelard of Bath*, [in:] *Dictionary of National Biography* (further: *DNB*), ed. by L. Stephen, vol. I, New York 1885, p. 137. On his discoveries in the field of natural history see: A.C. Crombie, *Nauka średniowieczna i początki nauki nowożytnej*, vol. 1-2, Polish transl. S. Lypacewicz, Warszawa 1960, see: vol. 2 Adelard of Bath index. Adelard as a philosopher see: G. D’Onofrio, *Historia teologii*, vol. 2: *Epoka średniowieczna*, Polish transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2005, pp. 253-255.

determine local time and latitude on the basis of the positions of the Sun and to calculate distance between the Earth and other planets. His translation of the Arab version of Euclid's work was to become the standard geometry textbook in the Western world. Adelard might have introduced the astrolabe, which he had improved, to the future king of England and his courtiers. The English scholar explained the workings of the astronomical device in a concise treatise which he dedicated to Henry and provided with the title *De Opere Astrolapous*<sup>13</sup>. Already in 1126, when Adelard returned to England after a long period of studies abroad, he gave astronomical tables based on the Arab version of Al-Chuwarizmi, to Henry I, Henry Plantagenet's grandfather<sup>14</sup>. It may be assumed that on the English court, like in other European countries, knowledge of astronomy was linked with astrology. In Henry II's milieu there was a court astrologist, Robert of Hereford, who appears under a singular date of 1185<sup>15</sup>. The belief in superstitions, however, was not a dominating feature of Henry II's character. He had a singular interest, though, in the nature of beings and all Creation. Probably, that quality of Henry encouraged the English monk, Robert of Cricklade (died c. 1170), who was the prior of St. Frideswide in Oxford<sup>16</sup>, to compile a nine-chapter anthology of excerpts from Pliny the Elder's (23-79) *Natural History*, an encyclopaedic work in thirty-seven books. According to historians, the value of Pliny's work is of variable quality. Pliny drew most information concerning biology from works of Aristotle. Robert's original input in the field of zoology, exceedingly popular in the Middle Ages, is restricted to legendary beasts and undocumented folklore<sup>17</sup>. Books XII-XIX treat of botany, and though much of its contents is taken from Theophrastus, a part of it is truly original, based on observations which he made during his travels in Germania. Pliny explains the title of his work and elucidates the purpose of taking up such practical studies as examining "the nature of things, that is life"<sup>18</sup>. Abbreviated version of Pliny's *Natural History*, dedicated by Robert of Cricklade to Henry II, with the racy title *Defloratio Plinii*, skipped numerous place names "from which tribute could no longer be collected"<sup>19</sup>. Names of such Roman authors as Frontinus, Aulus Gellius and Macrobius are mentioned there much more frequently than names of ancient historians. The compilation made by Robert of Cricklade for the English king, his courtiers and educated clerics proved to be a valuable source of knowledge for the whole Western world about distant, unknown and sometimes fantasized countries.

While in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in England and France there was a strong urge to seek the Earthly Paradise, which was believed to have been discov-

<sup>13</sup> Ch.H. Haskins, *Henry II as a Patron...*, p. 74; art. *Adelard of Bath*, [in:] *Britannica Polish Edition* (further: *Britannica*), vol. 1, Poznań 1997, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> A.C. Crombie, *Nauka średniowieczna...*, pp. 25f.

<sup>15</sup> Ch.H. Haskins, *Henry II as Patron...*, p. 73, note 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 75; art. *Robert of Cricklade*, [in:] *DNB*, vol. 48, 1896, pp. 368f.

<sup>17</sup> Art. *Robert of Cricklade...*, p. 369.

<sup>18</sup> Pliniusz Starszy, *Historia naturalna (wybór)*, Polish transl. I. Zawadzka, T. Zawadzki, Wrocław-Kraków 1961, Preface, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ch.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century...*, p. 112.

ered in the distant past by St Brendan and his companions<sup>20</sup>, in the latter half of that century Europe was preoccupied with the utopian idea of a Christian kingdom situated on the other side of the globe, behind a ring of pagan lands. Shortly before 1177 there appeared a florid letter from a mysterious king John, addressed to European rulers<sup>21</sup>. Its issuer described immense riches of his kingdom and called his addressees and their people to accept his supremacy. That forgery, whose aim remained unclear, proved to be evocative enough to make Pope Alexander III send a letter by means of which he tried to establish contact with the distant "Christian monarch"<sup>22</sup>. The mission of delivering this letter to the alleged priest – king was entrusted to a special messenger, Philip, physician of the papal court. Philip was given the papal letter and he was supposed to travel to the mysterious kingdom, but immediately after departing from Venice he disappeared never to be heard of again<sup>23</sup>.

The court of early Plantagenets showed interest in the existence of the realm of "long forgotten Christians" situated beyond the ecumene of the followers of Islam. Such conclusion can be justified by the interpolation of the letter of pope Alexander III (died 1181) to Prester John (also: Presbyter Johannes), included in the chronicles of most English historians of the time, such as Benedict of Peterborough, Roger of Hoveden, Ralph of Diceto or Roger of Wendover, appearing under the date of 1178 or 1179<sup>24</sup>. The belief in the existence in a remote country of a ruler endowed with the supreme spiritual and earthly authority was so deeply ingrained in England that it seemed natural to compare the doings of William de Longchamp (died 1197), the chief justiciar who acted on Richard the Lionheart's (1157-1199) behalf during his campaign in the Holy Land, to Prester John. He was accused of acting as if he were the abovementioned priest, making arbitrary decisions about matters of both state and Church<sup>25</sup>.

The motif of Prester John and his remote kingdom provides a glimpse into geographical horizons of the English intelligentsia, if we can speak of such in the reign of early Plantagenets. Later, or maybe at the same time as the legend of Prester John's kingdom, those ideas were supplemented by the story of a mysterious eastern ruler, the Old Man of the Mountain, and his totally obedient sect of assass-

<sup>20</sup> *Żegluga świętego Brendana opata (Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis)*, ed. J. Strzelczyk, Polish transl. I. Lewandowski, pp. 105-161; see also his Commentary, pp. 163-173, comp. Ch.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century...*, p. 316.

<sup>21</sup> F. Zarncke, *Der Priester Johannes* [part 1], *Abhandlungen der phil.-hist. Klasse der Königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 7 (1879), pp. 827-1030; [part 2] 8 (1883), pp. 1-186. Among modern works see: L. Gumilow, *Poiski wymyślnego carstwa*, Moskwa 1970, Polish transl. S. Michalski, *Śladami cywilizacji wielkiego stepu*, Warszawa 1973; Essays of the Polish authors: *W poszukiwaniu królestwa Kapłana Jana*, ed. J. Strzelczyk, Gdańsk 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Polish translation of the Papal letter to King – Prester John see: *W poszukiwaniu królestwa Kapłana Jana...*, [part 2] Texts, pp. 19-22.

<sup>23</sup> C.F. Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John*, [in:] *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes*, ed. Ch.F. Beckingham and B. Hamilton, Aldershot 1996, pp. 1-22.

<sup>24</sup> R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, London 1959 (first ed. 1953), note 1, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> G. Cambrensis, *Opera*, ed. J.C. Brewer, Rolls Series (further: RS), vol. 4, London 1872, p. 425; comp.: R.W. Southern, *The Making of...*, p. 76.

sins<sup>26</sup>. In England this version appears twice in the work of Walter Map (died c. 1216), *De Nugis Curialium*, first when he writes about endeavours on the part of the assassins to achieve a rapprochement with the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which were frustrated by the Knights Templar. Walter Map believes that subjects of the Old Man of the Mountain were willing to adopt Christianity, but the Knights Templar, who were passionate warriors, killed a group of envoys sent by the Old Man of the Mountain<sup>27</sup>. Walter Map mentions assassins again in the context of Conrad of Montferrat's murder on 28 April 1191. He expresses there an opinion unfavourable to Conrad<sup>28</sup>.

The motif of assassins was also taken up by English historians of the time who were trying to prove that there was no truth in the rumours about alleged cooperation of the crusader King Richard the Lionheart with the Old Man of the Mountain in the assassination of Conrad of Montferrat, who had been designated to the role of a titular king of Jerusalem<sup>29</sup>. The propaganda of the English court resorted to an obvious forgery in order to defend Richard against any accusations – an alleged letter from the Old Man of the Mountain in which he clears Richard of all suspicion of taking part in Conrad's assassination and plotting against the life of the French King Philip II Augustus (1165-1223)<sup>30</sup>. Both motifs – about Prester John and his kingdom and about the Old Man of the Mountain and the assassins – show the breadth of geographical horizons, and indirectly also the scope of geographical knowledge of the English court. There is no doubt that both elements of geographical erudition resulted from the crusading ideology and military expeditions to the Holy Land.

The court of early Plantagenets was also visited by Gervase of Tilbury (died c. 1228), an erudite traveller with strong geographical interests, whose profile has been presented by the Polish scholar Jerzy Strzelczyk<sup>31</sup>. Gervase of Tilbury appears as a courtier of three rulers: Henry II Plantagenet, Henry the Young King (1155-1183) and William I of Sicily (1155-1189). When he was serving the English kings, he took part in the diplomatic mission to the royal court of William II of Sicily in August 1176 with the aim of accompanying Joan, Henry II's daughter, to Sicily,

<sup>26</sup> J. Hauziński, *Musulmańska sekta asasynów w europejskim piśmiennictwie wieków średnich*, Poznań 1978, passim; L. Hellmuth, *Die Aassassinen Legende in der österreichischen Geschichtsdichtung des Mittelalters*, Wien 1988, pp. 45-54.

<sup>27</sup> W. Map, *De Nugis Curialium*...: "obiter positus insidiis interfecerunt opidani Templarii, ut aiunt, ne fides euacuaretur infidelium ad pacis unitatem. Sunt enim, ut aiunt, Axassessi primi paganorum infidelitatis et incredencie magistri. Senex autem fraude comperta priorem compescuit freno diaboli deuocionem, siluitque Dominus facere quod sponondisse uidebatur". Dist. I, c. 22, p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, Dist. V, c. 6, pp. 483f., Marquis of Montferrat was confused by Map with his son Boniface, who took over as Marquis when his father set off on the Third Crusade. Previt  Orton, *The Early History of the House of Savoy (1000-1233)*, Cambridge 1912, pp. 355ff.

<sup>29</sup> J. Hauziński, *Musulmańska sekta asasynów*..., pp. 130-133, comp. Anex no. 17, p. 169. On contemporary accusations against Richard, see: *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, ed. W. Stubbs, RS, 1864, pp. 338-342, 444-445.

<sup>30</sup> On exculpating King Richard from the charges see: Richard of Devizes, *Chronicle*, ed. J.T. Appleby, London 1963, p. 80 and a note.

<sup>31</sup> J. Strzelczyk, *Gerwazy z Tilbury. Studium z dziejów uczoności geograficznej w średniowieczu*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1970, passim.

where she was supposed to marry William II. According to Oswald Balzer, the Sicilian mission exerted considerable influence on Gervase's later life, since in the course of it he got into closer contact with Henry the Young King, whose court in Normandy Joan's retinue visited, and then he got acquainted with William II of Sicily and his court<sup>32</sup>. Finally, Balzer emphasizes the importance of Gervase's stay in Venice, where during the summer of 1177, he was an eyewitness of emperor Frederick I Barbarossa's reconciliation with the pope Alexander III<sup>33</sup>. It is difficult to provide detailed information about Gervase's life in the years 1183-1189, when he received education in Reims and then continued his studies in Bologna or in Paris, or possibly in both academic centres in different periods of life. There is no evidence that he returned to England or renewed his contacts with the court of Plantagenets. However, in his later period of life, when he settled in Ebstorf in Germany, he might have travelled sporadically to his mother country<sup>34</sup>. It cannot be ruled out that after the defeat of the emperor Otto IV of the Welf dynasty at the Battle of Bouvines (27 July 1214), Gervase went to England. It seems that he met there Ralph of Coggeshall (died after 1227), a monastic intellectual and historian. Ralph writes in his chronicle that he got acquainted with Gervase, but he also describes a shameful episode from the scholar's life. According to Ralph of Coggeshall, he played a part in sentencing to death a Norman girl who had refused to satisfy his lust<sup>35</sup>. In an act of revenge, he accused her of professing the Cathar heresy, as a result of which she was burnt at the stake. There is circumstantial evidence that Ralph's testimony refers to the year 1200. According to J. Strzelczyk, and to a certain extent also to other historians, Gervase of Tilbury in the evening of his life (after 1231) became a parish priest in Ebstorf close to Lüneburg in Lower Saxony, where he was to draw up the Ebstorf Map, one of the most important monuments of medieval cartography<sup>36</sup>.

Jerzy Strzelczyk recalled the intense interest of the English in geography and cartography. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of the *Domesday Book* in this respect. Written soon after the Norman conquest of England for fiscal and administrative purposes, it contains numerous references to spatial and geographical realities of the insular part of the Plantagenet empire<sup>37</sup>.

It should be also mentioned that Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis) provided a vivid description of his native Wales<sup>38</sup>. He was the author of several books of

<sup>32</sup> O. Balzer, *Studium o Kadlubku*, [in:] *Pisma pośmiertne*, vol. 1, Lwów 1934, pp. 82-83; J. Strzelczyk, *Gerwazy z Tilbury...*, pp. 39f.

<sup>33</sup> O. Balzer, *Studium o Kadlubku...*, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> J. Strzelczyk, *Gerwazy z Tilbury...*, p. 47, note 88. This author rejects, however, the possibility of Gervase's death in England; see a different opinion: *Gervase of Tilbury*, *DNB*, vol. XX, 1890, p. 241: ("Gervase probably ended his days in England").

<sup>35</sup> *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson, London 1875, RS, no. 66, pp. 122-124.

<sup>36</sup> J. Strzelczyk, *Gerwazy z Tilbury...*, pp. 44ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 57f.

<sup>38</sup> Biographical notes with "classic" literatures see: J.W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing*, vol. 1: *From the Earliest Times to the End of the Seventeenth Century*, New York 1954 (ed. 1, 1942), pp. 263f.

chorographic nature, that is works giving detailed geographic and ethnographic characteristics of a smaller territorial unit (in that case of Wales), enriched with numerous historical data. His *Itinerarium Cambriae* and *Descriptio Cambriae* formed the basis for early cartographic presentations<sup>39</sup>. Also, Gerald's *Topographia Hibernica*, written in 1188, is of similar nature. However, his *Expugnatio Hibernica*, a work dedicated to Richard the Lionheart when he was yet a duke, focuses rather on historical information than chorographic detail<sup>40</sup>. One should not forget here about another work of that period taking geography of British Isles for its main object of interest. At the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century a monastic historian Gervase of Canterbury wrote his topographic description of England, which he provided with an ambiguous title *Mapa Mundi*<sup>41</sup>.

Gerald of Wales, similarly to other writers of his time, filled his works with various stories and anecdotes. For example, in his treatise *Itinerarium Cambriae*, he quotes a story which he heard from his uncle, bishop of St David's<sup>42</sup>. A certain priest named Eliodorus recollected his school years. When he was twelve years old he played truant and out of fear of strict school discipline, he hid in a cave by a river. Suddenly, he saw two people of unusually short stature, reminding him of Pygmies, who invited him to follow them. They went together through dark underground passages to finally reach a mysterious, dimly lit land of great beauty. The king of that wonderful realm gave the boy his son for a guide, thanks to which the boy could go back home. When Eliodor confided his secret to his mother, she made him go back to the underground kingdom to bring gold which he saw there in large quantities. The obedient boy brought his mother a golden ball which was given to him by the king's son. However, when he was about to enter his house, he tripped over a threshold. Suddenly, two Pygmies captured the gold, hitting him on the face and scolding him in loud voices. Painfully ashamed, he came back home. Eliodor finished his story saying that he spent several years trying to find the passage to the underground world, but to no avail.

Similar accounts can be found in other chronicles of the time, for instance the works of the abovementioned Gervase of Tilbury<sup>43</sup>. The marvellous element imbedded in those works does not reduce their documentary value. On the contrary, it is rather an "interesting illustration of the merging of ancient folk tales about underground creatures, popular especially among Germanic and Celtic peoples with 'scholarly', partly forgotten and now revived with the wave of Twelfth Century Renaissance, study of the Antipodes"<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> See: J. Strzelczyk, *Gerwazy z Tilbury...*, p. 57, also note 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Ed. W. Stubbs, RS, no. 71, vol. 2, London 1880, pp. 414-444.

<sup>42</sup> *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, editor in chief J.S. Brewer, vol. 6, London 1868; J.F. Dimock lib. 1, cap. 8, p. 75, English transl., *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis*, London-New York 1894, p. 390.

<sup>43</sup> Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia, recreation for an Emperor*, ed. S.E. Banks, J.W. Binns, Oxford 2002; Comp.: J. Strzelczyk, *Klucz do poznania nieba*, Gdańsk 2003, pp. 29-31.

<sup>44</sup> J. Strzelczyk, *Klucz do poznania nieba...*, p. 28.

Another work worth mentioning here is a unique description of London which was introduced by William FitzStephen (died c. 1191) into the Latin life of Thomas Becket (died 1170)<sup>45</sup>. The map of Jerusalem, dating back to 1200 is, according to Strzelczyk “independent from the most widespread in the Middle Ages *Situs Jerusalem* type, which was preserved in the London manuscript”<sup>46</sup>. Although there is no sufficient evidence of direct relationship of those relics with the *curia regis* of the Plantagenets, such relationship cannot be ruled out. The map of London could prove useful in the case of internal disturbances in the city which were not infrequent during Richard I's absence or during John Lackland's (1199-1216) reign. The map of Jerusalem, on the other hand, must have been a useful guide for both the crusaders and pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land.

The court of early Plantagenets attracted not only scholars but also poets and historians. Benoit de Sainte-Maure (also: Benoit de Sainte-More, died c. 1173), dedicated his *Le Roman de Troie* to Eleanor of Aquitaine, and if we were to assume that he was the very Benoit who was the author of a versified history of the princes of Normandy, he also dedicated his extensive annalistic work written in Old French to the English King Henry II<sup>47</sup>. According to James Westfall Thompson, the English historian of historiography, “Angevin rulers were always interested in the promotion of historical writing”<sup>48</sup>. Historical works which were written in the early period of the reign of Plantagenets in England, however, still cannot be referred to as court historiography, even despite the fact that particular authors writing for rulers, rightly discerned expectations of their patrons. Ailred, the famous abbot of Rievaulx (died 1167), is believed to have dedicated to Henry, when he was yet a boy, two historical works, that is *Genealogia Regum* and a hagiographic *Vita et Miracula Edwardi Regis*<sup>49</sup>.

Moreover, Jordan Fantosme (died c. 1185), a cleric who had close contacts with the court of Henry II, dedicated to the king of England a versified chronicle of the English-Scottish war of 1173-1174<sup>50</sup>, while Robert of Torigny (died 1186), a Norman abbot of Mont Saint Michel (also: Robert de Monte), and a godfather of one of Eleanor's daughters, wrote a versified chronicle of Normandy. He seems to have dedicated his work to both Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine<sup>51</sup>.

The links of Ralph of Diceto (also: Radulph de Diceto, died c. 1202) who wrote a chronicle focusing on the deeds of English kings from the year 1148 up to 1200, with the royal court of Plantagenets, seem to be obvious. Ralph praises Henry II,

<sup>45</sup> J.C. Robertson [in:] *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, RS, no. 67, vol 3, London 1877, pp. 2-12.

<sup>46</sup> J. Strzelczyk, *Gerwazy z Tilbury...*, p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> Ch.H. Haskins, *Henry II as a Patron...*, p. 75.

<sup>48</sup> J.W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing...*, p. 257.

<sup>49</sup> Ch.H.Haskins, *Henry II as a Patron...*, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> J. Fantosme, *Chronicle. Addressed to Henry between 1173 and 1183*, ed. R. Howlet, [in:] *Chronicles of the Reigns Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, vol. 3, London 1886, pp. 202-377.

<sup>51</sup> en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\_of\_Torigni; see his *The Chronicles of Robert de Monte*, ed. J. Stevenson, London 1856.

who “ruled peacefully so vast a kingdom, having subdued both the Scots and the Welsh”<sup>52</sup>. He shows Henry II as a loving father, always generous and forgiving for his sons.

Henry II’s son and successor, Richard I the Lionheart, held patronage over biographers who accompanied him during the crusade, that is over the royal chaplain Anselm and his almoner Milo, the abbot of Le Pin<sup>53</sup>. Nothing is known about their work, but it is generally assumed that it was written in romance tradition. It seems that Ambrose (fl. c. 1190), a poet who had close contacts with Richard I, based his work *El Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, praising the deeds of the English king, on the work of Anselm and Milo<sup>54</sup>. Another historian who remained in Richard’s immediate milieu was an anonymous chaplain of the Knights Templar, an author of the initial part of *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, a chronicle edited in 1191-1192. This chronicle was later incorporated into a compilation *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, an extensive prose work written in Latin and divided into six books by Richard, a canon of Holy Trinity in London<sup>55</sup>.

Another historian of the era of first Plantagenets, Richard of Devizes (died c. 1192), a Benedictine monk from a monastery at Winchester, wrote, apart from the chronicle of his own monastic order (*Annales de Wintonia*), which he finished on the year 1135, *Chronicon de Rebus Gestis Ricardi Primi*, concluding his chronicle with the year 1192<sup>56</sup>. It should be emphasized, however, that this historian had no direct links with the royal court.

Richard I’s brother and successor, John Lackland, because of his controversial actions, was unpopular among monastic historians (for example annalists of Dunstable, Bury St Edmunds, Worcester) as well as among main English historians of the time, such as Ralph of Coggeshall or Roger of Wendover (died in 1236, wrote the history of England and other countries up to 1235). John, who disliked monks in general, had no outstanding writers in his immediate milieu who could write an ambitious historical work<sup>57</sup>. The actions of John Lackland are presented in the work celebrating chivalrous deeds of the famous knight and politician, William Marshal<sup>58</sup>. In that time the role of official centre of English historiography is taken over by the Benedictine abbey of St Albans<sup>59</sup>.

Although the reign of early Plantagenets brought about certain revival of histori-

<sup>52</sup> Ralph of Diceto, *Ymagines Historiarum, Opera Historica*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols, RS, London 1876, vol. 2, p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to the Early Sixteenth Century*, vol. 1, London 1974, p. 239.

<sup>54</sup> K. Norgate, *The Itinerarium Peregrinorum and the Song of Ambrose*, “English Historical Review” 1910, 25, pp. 523-547.

<sup>55</sup> J.W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing...*, pp. 319-320; A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England...*, p. 239.

<sup>56</sup> Richard of Devizes, *Chronicle...*

<sup>57</sup> A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England...*, p. 321

<sup>58</sup> *L’Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*, ed. P. Meyer, Paris 1891-1901, 3 vols, p. 345.

<sup>59</sup> J.W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing...*, pp. 275ff.

cal writing in England, writers were usually commissioned to write romance histories. Both, Wace and Benoit de Sainte Maure were asked by Henry II to compose in Anglo-Norman a romance history on the beginnings of the English nation<sup>60</sup>. Such texts were most probably read out to the king and his court for pleasure and instruction. It should be also recalled that Henry II was a patron of Gerald of Wales and Walter Map, whose works, although not strictly annalistic or historical, include historical material<sup>61</sup>. Although Richard I did not commission directly any chronicle, there are two historical works written during his reign: *L'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte* written by Ambrose and anonymous *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, which was completed ten years later by abbot Richard as *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*<sup>62</sup>.

The English royal court of the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries attracted also English scholars who, similarly to Adelard of Bath, were connoisseurs of Arab scientific legacy and pioneering researchers in natural history. First of all, Daniel of Morley (died c. 1210), author of *Philosophia: or Liber de Naturis Inferiorum et Superiorum*, which he wrote at the request of John of Oxford, the bishop of Norwich, should be mentioned here<sup>63</sup>. Little is known about his life. The only information we have comes from the letter he wrote to the bishop of Norwich, where he deprecates the level of teaching at Paris. It appears that Daniel left Paris to continue his education at Toledo, where he could listen to the teachings of "the wisest philosophers in the world"<sup>64</sup>. Then he explains: "As I was called by my friends and asked to return from Spain, I arrived in England with a considerable number of precious books"<sup>65</sup>. Daniel of Morley wrote his compendium of philosophy c. 1189. Court circles must have been informed about his return from Spain and subsequent scholarly work in England.

Little more can be said about Daniel's contemporary, Alfred of Sareshel/Sarashel (Alfredus Anglicus, fl. at the turn of 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries), author of a treatise *De Motu Cordis*, which he dedicated to his friend Alexander Neckam/Neckham before the year 1217<sup>66</sup>. Alfred's treatise seems to be heavily influenced by Aristotle's *De Causis de Anima*, which was translated in Toledo already at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the field of medicine he bases his ideas on Galen and the tradition of the

<sup>60</sup> Ch.H. Haskins, *Henry II as a Patron...*, pp. 74f.; J.W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing...*, p. 231. On Wace: art. *Wace*, *DNB*, vol. 58, pp. 404f.

<sup>61</sup> J.W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing...*, p. 263.

<sup>62</sup> J.G. Edwards, *The Itinerarium Regis Ricardi and the Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, [in:] *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, Manchester 1933, pp. 59-74.

<sup>63</sup> E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej w wiekach średnich*, Polish transl. S. Zalewski, Warszawa 1966, p. 643, note 3; T. Silverstein, *Daniel of Morley, English Cosmologist and Student of Arabic Science*, "Medieval Studies" 1948, X, pp. 179-186.

<sup>64</sup> Ch. Burnett, *The Introduction of Arabic Learning into British Schools*, [in:] *The Introduction of Arabic Philosophy into Europe*, ed. Ch.E. Butterworth, B.A. Kessel, New York-Köln 1993, p. 49.

<sup>65</sup> J. Le Goff, *Inteligencja w wiekach średnich*, Polish transl. E. Bąkowska, Warszawa 1966, p. 32.

<sup>66</sup> E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*, p. 643, note 2; J. Strzelczyk, *Gerwazy z Tilbury...*, p. 53.

Salernitan school. What is more, Alfred of Sareshel added glosses to Pseudo-Aristotle's *Meteorologica* and *De Plantis*, collected at a later date into a single work as *Questiones Naturales*<sup>67</sup>. According to Etienne Gilson, due to glosses to Pseudo-Aristotle's *Meteorologica* and *De Plantis*, Alfred enters into the ranks of forerunners of natural sciences<sup>68</sup>.

It is also important to mention the figure of Alexander Neckham (Neckam, Nequam; 1157-1217), who was an Augustinian canon and a tutor of John Lackland<sup>69</sup>. Alexander Neckham is believed to have been born in September 1157 in St Albans in Hertfordshire, at the same night as Richard I, the future king of England. His mother was chosen to be Richard's wet nurse and she breastfed both children<sup>70</sup>. Neckham's major work, was a kind of encyclopaedic book provided with a longish title *De Naturis Rerum et de Laudibus Divinae Sapientiae* (or: *De Natura Rerum*)<sup>71</sup>. Neckham is rated among the first English Aristotelians, which is sometimes questioned. His works however, make him a distinguished representative of the allegoric interpretation of nature, which was widespread in the Middle Ages<sup>72</sup>. His most famous work, however, is *Speculum Speculationum*, an ambitious theological-encyclopaedic work in which he aimed at "securing the Christian doctrine against false interpretations of new heretics – the Cathars"<sup>73</sup>.

Finally, one cannot forget Robert Grosseteste (died 1253), the future bishop of Lincoln (from 1235), who at the close of the period considered here, entered the orbit of "high" aristocracy of the Plantagenet empire, even though he was never a royal courtier<sup>74</sup>. Both, the meaning of his nickname and his descent are not clear. Robert was born c. 1175 in a little town of Stradbroke in Suffolk where he might have obtained elementary education from Benedictine monks, who owned most of the place<sup>75</sup>. Gerald of Wales writes in his letter that Robert de Grosseteste already in 1199 was a Master at Oxford<sup>76</sup> where he had probably received higher education. It was probably c. 1191 when he was ordained a presbyter. Later, because of his profound education, he was employed in the curia of William de Vere (died 1198), a bishop of Hereford<sup>77</sup>. Since 1215 up to 1221 he was a chancellor of Oxford Uni-

<sup>67</sup> Z. Kuksewicz, *Zarys filozofii średniowiecznej...*, p. 232

<sup>68</sup> E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*, p. 643.

<sup>69</sup> Art. *Neckam or Neckham, Alexander*, *DNB*, vol. XL, 1894, pp. 154f., a slightly different biographical entry in: Ch.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century...*, pp. 134f.; Neckam as a philosopher see: E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*, pp. 642f.; Neckham as a theologian: G. d'Onofrio, *Historia teologii...*, pp. 271f.

<sup>70</sup> Art. *Neckam*, *DNB*, vol. XL, p. 154.

<sup>71</sup> E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*, p. 642.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>73</sup> G. d'Onofrio, *Historia teologii...*, p. 271.

<sup>74</sup> P. Böhner, E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej od Justyna do Mikołaja Kuzańczyka*, Polish transl. E. Stomma, Warszawa 1962, pp. 401-414 (systematic review of his theories); E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*, especially pp. 259-262, 644-647 (see also the index).

<sup>75</sup> Art. *Grosseteste Robert*, *DNB*, vol. XXIII, 1890, pp. 275-278.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*; P. Böhner, E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*, p. 401.

<sup>77</sup> *Grosseteste Robert*, *DNB*, vol. XXIII, p. 275.

versity. His contemporaries, especially Roger Bacon, thought of him as a man of science. Robert Grosseteste was unwilling to accept the position of the chancellor of Oxford University. What is more, in 1232 he resigned from the office of archdeacon of Oxford. As a theologian he defended the interests of the Church, based on three basic principles: on the conviction in supreme value of ministry, on the concept of Church as a highly centralized and hierarchical structure and on the belief in Church's supremacy over the state<sup>78</sup>. Therefore, his links with the government, in this case with the court of John the Lackland, remain unclear. However, his neutral submissiveness towards Henry III (1207-1272) seems logical. Robert's philosophical ideas are expounded in numerous textbooks of the history of philosophy<sup>79</sup>. For that reason, it is only important to emphasize here that he was strongly influenced by Arab treatises from the field of optics, which made him attribute the central role in the creation and in the structure of the physical world to light. He expressed his ideas referring to this subject in the treatise *De Luce Seu de Inchoatione Formarum*, which was a compilation of his earlier writings (maybe even dating back to the period before 1210?). Robert explains the creation of the universe referring to physics. He based his philosophical theory of nature on optics, mathematics and astronomy, that is the achievements of branches of science which he was studying. It seems that his writings proved more valuable for the history of science than to the history of philosophy<sup>80</sup>.

To sum up, the authors mentioned above, active in the period of the Twelfth Century Renaissance, based their scholarly work on the writings of ancient authors, especially the Greeks. For instance, Daniel of Morley knew Aristotle's *Physics*, *De Coelo* and *De Sensu et Sensato*, while Alfred Sareshel referred to *De Anima*. All interpretations of these works were subordinated to Christian doctrine. It should be emphasized that the selection of authors and their works mentioned in this article has been narrowed to those staying within the orbit of the court of early Plantagenets. A certain revival of pseudo-scientific and scientific pursuits, typical for the court of Henry II, was triggered by personal interests of that monarch. However, none of the disciplines which intrigued Henry II, apart from the law, achieved the status of scientific theory.

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<sup>78</sup> M. Powicke, *Robert Grosseteste. Scholar and Bishop*, Oxford 1955, p. 40ff.

<sup>79</sup> P. Böhner, E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*; E. Gilson, *Historia filozofii chrześcijańskiej...*; Z. Kuksewicz, *Zarys filozofii średniowiecznej...*; G. D'Onofrio, *Historia teologii...*

<sup>80</sup> Z. Kuksewicz, *Zarys filozofii średniowiecznej...*, p. 273, n. 81; Ch.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century...*, pp. 193-223 (older literature there); W.S. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, t. I, London 1903; *The Oxford History of England*, ed. G. Clark, vols 1-3, Oxford 1934-1965.

## Summary

**Links of the court of Henry II Plantagenet with scientific trends of the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century**

The purpose of this paper is to prove that the royal court of Henry II Plantagenet and his sons attracted renowned scholars, historians and poets of the time fascinated with the writings of great authors of antiquity. The interest of Henry II for literature and science stemmed from his family tradition. Intellectual curiosity was a distinguishing feature of both his grandfather Henry I Beauclerc and his father Geoffrey Plantagenet. In his youth Henry II received instruction from three tutors: Master Peter of Saintes, Master Mathew and an eminent Norman academic, William of Conches. It seems that the Angevin rulers of England promoted the revival of historical writing in the British Isles, holding patronage over such poets and historians as Wace, Benoit de Sainte-Maure, Ailred of Rievaulx, Jordan Fantosme, Robert of Torigny, Ralph of Diceto and chroniclers of the Third Crusade. Finally, the court of early Plantagenets attracted eminent English scholars interested in the Arab scientific legacy, for instance Adelard of Bath who translated works of 9<sup>th</sup> century Arab mathematicians into Latin and who dedicated a treatise on the workings of the astrolabe to Henry II, Daniel of Morley who studied at Toledo and, inspired by the writings of Aristotle, wrote a treatise *Philosophia: or Liber de Naturis Inferiorum et Superiorum*, and Alfred of Sareshel, author of a treatise *De Motu Cordis*, influenced by Aristotle's *De Anima*.